

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF PUERTO RICO

JUANA HERRERA, et al.,

E Plaintiffs,

v.

CIVIL NO. 98-19267 RLAT

PEDRO TOLEDO DAVILA, et al.

Defendants.

10 ORDER DENYING DEFENDANTS' MOTIONS FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT

11 Present before the court for disposition are three (3) separate
12 motions for summary judgment filed by the remaining defendants in
13 these proceedings¹ and plaintiffs' omnibus response thereto. The court
14 having reviewed the legal arguments presented by the parties as well
15 as the exhibits submitted hereby finds as follows.

I. BACKGROUND

17 This action was instituted by the mother, stepfather and sister
18 of the deceased RAFAEL HERRERA ("HERRERA"). HERRERA, who at the time
19 of his death, was a 27 year old citizen of the Dominican Republic
20 entered Puerto Rico illegally by sea in a small boat in **April 1996**.
21 Plaintiff JUANA HERRERA, on behalf of her deceased son, claims civil
22 rights violations under 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983, 1985 and 1988, the Fourth,
23 Fifth, Eighth, Ninth and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S.

25 ¹ See Partial Judgment filed on August 10, 1999 dismissing
26 claims asserted against codefendant PEDRO TOLEDO-DAVILA (docket No.
88).

37

1 **CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)****Page 2**

2 Constitution. Additionally, plaintiffs invoke the court's 28 U.S.C.
3 § 1337 supplemental jurisdiction to entertain claims arising under
4 Puerto Rico statutes with respect to pendent parties.
5

6 **II. UNCONTESTED FACTS**

7 The parties agree on the following version of the events leading
8 to the claims charged in the complaint. However, the specific
9 details of the arrest as well as those leading to decedent's death as
10 proffered by plaintiffs are totally at odds with defendants' recount
11 for which reason they appear separately stated in the section that
12 follows. Further, plaintiffs contest the true motive behind the
13 noted "Zero Tolerance" Plan as one exclusively geared at targeting
14 undocumented Dominican nationals.
15

16 On **August 16, 1997** the PUERTO RICO POLICE DEPARTMENT ("PRPD")
17 carried out an "operativo" (operation) on bar-type businesses in
18 various sectors of the San Juan metropolitan area as part of what
19 was termed a "Zero Tolerance" Plan.
20

21 The interventions were carried out by members of various
22 divisions of the PRPD as well as agents from the PUERTO RICO TREASURY
23 DEPARTMENT.
24

25 The highest ranking officer for the "operativo" that night was
26 codefendant Lieutenant JOSE DIAZ PORTALATIN, of the PRPD Special
Arrests Unit. The second highest officer present was codefendant
Sargent EDUARDO MARTINEZ COLON ("MARTINEZ-COLON") also of the Special
Arrests Unit.
27

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 3

2

3 According to the PRPD, the purpose of the aforementioned Plan
4 was to intervene with drug selling points, verify that businesses
5 were operating legally, and intervene with criminal activities in
6 general. The TREASURY DEPARTMENT agents would verify the status of
7 the various licences required for the businesses to legally operate
8 and sell liquor.

9

10 The evening of **August 16, 1997** when the personnel assigned to
11 the "operativo" arrived at an establishment known as "El Nuevo
12 Horizonte", decedent RAFAEL HERRERA took flight, running into the
13 local neighborhood and hiding under a car parked on a sidewalk.

14

15 Upon instructions from JOSE DIAZ PORTALATIN, codefendants
16 ORLANDO ORTIZ and ROBERT GARCIA-PEREZ followed decedent. Decedent
17 was arrested and eventually placed in a van together with other
18 illegal aliens previously detained that evening.

19

20 After decedent was placed in the van the "operativo" continued
21 through other parts of the San Juan metropolitan area.

22

23 Upon conclusion of the "operativo" the van was driven to the
24 airport in order to deliver the detainees to the U.S. Immigration
25 Services ("INS"). Due to the late hour there were no INS agents
available to take the detainees into custody. Hence, the detainees
were taken to the Puerto Nuevo Police Station for an overnight stay.

26

When the other detainees got out of the van upon arrival at the
Puerto Nuevo Police Station the officers noticed that decedent was
not moving.

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 4

2

Codefendant JOSE DIAZ-PORTALATIN gave orders to take decedent to
the nearest hospital. Decedent was pronounced dead at approximately
2:00 a.m. upon arrival at the Emergency room of the Rio Piedras
Medical Center.

6

According to the autopsy performed by DR. YOCASTA BRUGAL, of the
P.R. FORENSIC MEDICINE INSTITUTE, HERRERA died of natural causes,
i.e., due to a sickle cell anemia crisis.

9

An internal investigation carried out by the SPECIAL
INVESTIGATION BUREAU of the P.R. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE concluded that
there was no evidence to support plaintiffs' allegations in the
complaint.

13

The PRPD conducted an investigation and also concluded there had
been no wrongdoing on the part of the government officers.

15

III. PLAINTIFFS' VERSION OF THE EVENTS

16

The following constitute plaintiffs' version of the events which
transpired on the evening of **August 16, 1997** which facts are duly
supported by the evidence attached to their opposition to defendants'
summary judgment requests.

20

The Zero Tolerance Plan in effect on **August 16, 1997** targeted
commercial establishments where Dominican nationals routinely
gathered.

23

The only individuals arrested as part of the Zero Tolerance Plan
were Dominicans residing illegally in Puerto Rico.

25

26

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 5

2

3 The true objective of the Zero Tolerance Plan was to round up
4 undocumented Dominican nationals and deliver them to federal
5 immigration authorities for deportation.

6

7 The TREASURY agents present during the "operativo" were used as
8 a pretext to justify entry into commercial establishments where
9 Dominican nationals were known to gather.

10

11 The TREASURY DEPARTMENT has regulatory power with respect to the
12 sale of alcoholic beverages and business volume "patentes".

13

14 On **August 16, 1997**, prior to decedent's arrest, several
15 Dominican nationals had been rounded up by police officers and asked
16 to produce their immigration documentation. Because they could not
17 produce them, they were placed in the van driven by codefendant
18 MIGUEL GUADALUPE-PARRILLA for eventual deportation.

19

20 The police intervened with these individuals strictly on the
21 basis of their physical appearance and presence in neighborhoods
22 where Dominican nationals were known to gather.

23

24 When decedent ran off the evening of **August 16, 1007** he was
25 chased by codefendants ORLANDO ORTIZ and ROBERT GARCIA PEREZ, one on
foot and the other by car upon instructions of codefendant DIAZ
PORTALATIN. Two gunshots were fired into the air.

26

27 Upon spotting decedent hiding under a car, codefendants ORLANDO
28 ORTIZ and ROBERT GARCIA PEREZ dragged decedent out, handcuffed him
29 and subjected him to a brutal beating witnessed by a local resident.

30

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 6

2

3 Decedent was pushed and forced to walk back to the area where he
4 had been first seen near "El Nuevo Horizonte" Bar. This was observed
5 by MARTINEZ-COLON who failed to intervene despite decedent's obvious
6 distress.

7

8 As they were approaching the area ORLANDO ORTIZ and ROBERT
9 GARCIA PEREZ again beat decedent smashing his head against an iron
10 gate in front of a local residence. This incident was also witnessed
11 by a local resident. Meanwhile, decedent kept pleading with the
12 officers to stop beating him.

13

14 Thereafter, decedent was placed inside a police vehicle
15 identified as an Isuzu Trooper purportedly for an additional beating.
16 The vehicle took off with decedent as well as codefendants ORLANDO
17 ORTIZ and ROBERT GARCIA PEREZ. Supervisory officers codefendants
18 EDUARDO MARTINEZ-COLON and JOSE DIAZ-PORTALATIN did nothing to
19 prevent the additional beating.

20

21 Subsequently, decedent was brought back to the white Ford van
22 where the other Dominican nationals were being held. According to a
23 witness codefendant MIGUEL GUADALUPE-PARRILLA threw decedent inside
24 the van. As a result thereof decedent hit the window frame with the
25 left side of his head and his body landed half on the vehicle's seat
26 and half on the floor.

27

28 Eventually HERRERA lost consciousness and was seen to be foaming
29 at the mouth by other passengers in the van. The detainees
30 expressed their concern regarding decedent's condition to the

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 7

2 officers riding in the van, including codefendant MIGUEL A. GUADALUPE
3 to no avail. The police officers paid no attention to the passenger's
4 concerns regarding decedent's condition by responding that he was
5 drunk.

6 The officers continued with the "operativo" moving on to other
7 locations and rounding up illegal aliens while decedent remained in
8 the van.

9 At some point the detainees requested that their handcuffs be
10 changed from their backs to the front. Codefendant JCSE DIAZ-
11 PORTALATIN agreed and all were changed except for HERRERA.
12 Codefendant DIAZ-PORTALATIN did nothing to ascertain what was wrong
13 with decedent.

14 After approximately one hour the van was driven to the airport
15 for handing over the detainees to the INS. Upon arrival all
16 detainees except for decedent disembarked to use the restroom. None
17 of the officers checked upon decedent at that time.

18 The other detainees were placed in the van once again because
19 there was no one available at INS at the airport to accept them at
20 that late hour. By then more than three hours had passed since the
21 initial intervention with the decedent.

22 The other detainees alerted the officers to the fact that
23 HERRERA was cold and they feared he might have died. The officers
24 disregarded this comment and blamed his temperature instead on the
25 air conditioning system.

26

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 8

2

3 It was not until arrival at the Puerto Nuevo Police Station when
4 all other passengers descended from the van that the police officers
5 took note of decedent's condition.

6

7 DR. IRA MEHLMAN, a specialist in trauma medicine with extensive
8 experience with sickle cell anemia, and who was retained by
9 plaintiffs in this case concluded that HERRERA died as a result of
10 severe trauma to his head. Further, DR. MEHLMAN disputes DR.
11 BRUGAL's conclusion concerning the role of sickle cell disease in
12 HERRERA's demise. According to DR. MEHLMAN decedent did not suffer
13 from sickle cell anemia but rather had a sickle cell trait, which
14 poses no significant effect on an individual's health and could not
have been the cause of HERRERA's death.

15

IV. SUMMARY JUDGMENT STANDARD

16

17 Rule 56(c) Fed. R. Civ. P., which sets forth the standard for
18 ruling on summary judgment motions, in pertinent part provides that
19 they shall be granted "if the pleadings, depositions, answers to
20 interrogatories, and admissions on file, together with the
21 affidavits, if any, show that there is no genuine issue as to any
22 material fact and that the moving party is entitled to a judgment as
23 a matter of law." Sands v. Ridefilm Corp., 212 F.3d 657, 660-61 (1st
24 Cir. 2000); Barreto-Rivera v. Medina-Vargas, 168 F.3d 42, 45 (1st Cir.
25 1999). The party seeking summary judgment must first demonstrate the
26 absence of a genuine issue of material fact in the record.
DeNovellis v. Shalala, 124 F.3d 298, 306 (1st Cir. 1997). A genuine

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 9

2 _____

3 issue exists if there is sufficient evidence supporting the claimed

4 factual disputes to require a trial. Morris v. Gov't Dev. Bank of

5 Puerto Rico, 27 F.3d 746, 748 (1st Cir. 1994); LeBlanc v. Great Am.

6 Ins. Co., 6 F.3d 836, 841 (1st Cir. 1993), cert. denied, 511 U.S.

7 1018, 114 S.Ct. 1398, 128 L.Ed.2d 72 (1994). A fact is material if

8 it might affect the outcome of a lawsuit under the governing law.

9 Morrissey v. Boston Five Cents Sav. Bank, 54 F. 3d 27, 31 (1st Cir.

10 1995).

11 In cases where the non-movant party bears the ultimate burden of

12 proof, he must present definite and competent evidence to rebut a

13 motion for summary judgment, Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477

14 U.S. 242, 256-257, 106 S.Ct. 2505, 91 L.Ed.2d 202 (1986); Navarro v.

15 Pfizer Corp., 261 F.3d 90, 94 (1st Cir. 2000); Grant's Dairy v. Comm'r

16 of Maine Dep't of Agric., 232 F.3d 8, 14 (1st Cir. 2000), and cannot

17 rely upon "conclusory allegations, improbable inferences, and

18 unsupported speculation". Lopez v. Rubianes, 230 F.3d 409, 412 (1st

19 Cir. 2000); Maldonado-Denis v. Castillo-Rodríguez, 23 F.3d 576, 581

20 (1st Cir. 1994); Medina-Muñoz v. R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., 896 F.2d

21 5, 8 (1st Cir. 1990).

22 **V. STANDING IN A § 1983 ACTION**

23 Defendants allege plaintiffs have no standing to assert a § 1983

24 claim because they were not personally deprived of any protected

25 right. However, plaintiffs have clarified that they are not

26 personally seeking relief under this provision. Rather, it is only

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 10

2 plaintiff JUANA HERRERA that is asserting the § 1983 claims on behalf
3 of her deceased son.

4 Thus, the relief sought by defendants under this argument is
5 **DENIED.**

6 VI. § 1983 ELEMENTS

7 The complaint charges violation of 42 U.S.C. § 1983 which reads:

8 Every person who, under color of any statute,
9 ordinance, regulation, custom or usage, of any State or
10 Territory, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen
11 of the United States or other person within the
12 jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights,
13 privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and
14 laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at
15 law, suit in equity, or other proceeding for redress.

16 Section 1983 does not create substantive rights but is rather a
17 procedural mechanism for enforcing constitutional or statutory
18 rights. Albright v. Oliver, 510 U.S. 266, 114 S.Ct. 807, 127 L.Ed.2d
19 114 (1994). Hence, it is plaintiffs' burden to identify the
20 particular underlying constitutional or statutory right that is
21 sought to be enforced via judicial proceedings.

22 In order to prevail in a § 1983 claim plaintiff must bring forth
23 evidence that (1) defendant acted "under color of state law" and (2)
24 deprivation of a federally protected right. Rogan v. City of Boston,
25 267 F.3d 24 (1st Cir. 2001); Dimarco-Zapa v. Cabanillas, 238 F.3d 25,

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 11

2 33 (1st Cir. 2001); Collins v. Nuzzo, 244 F.3d 246 (1st Cir. 2001);
 3 Barreto-Rivera, 168 F.3d at 45.
 4

5 All parties concede that the defendants were acting within the
 6 scope of their duties as state officers at all relevant times.
 7 Therefore, the first element is satisfied. We must then ascertain
 8 whether decedent was deprived of any federally protected right as a
 9 result of the events on the night of his demise.

10 **A. Excessive Use of Force**

11 HERRERA has identified a colorable claim for use of excessive
 12 force duly protected by the Fourth Amendment and hence actionable via
 13 § 1983. Claims for alleged use of excessive force during the course
 14 of an arrest are tested under the provisions of the Fourth Amendment
 15 which guarantees "[t]he right of the people to be secure in their
 16 persons... against unreasonable... seizures". Graham v. Connor, 490
 17 U.S. 386, 394, 109 S.Ct. 1865, 104 L.Ed.2d 443 (1989); Jarrett v.
 18 Town of Yarmouth, 331 F.3d 140, 148 (1st Cir. 2003); Bastien v.
 19 Goddard, 279 F.3d 10, 14 (1st Cir. 2002); Gaudreault v. Municipality
 20 of Salem, 923 F.2d 203, 205 (1st Cir. 1990). On the other hand,
 21 "[c]laims of excessive force by a police officer arising outside the
 22 context of a seizure, and thus outside the Fourth Amendment, are
 23 analyzed under substantive due process principles." Cummings v.
 24 McIntire, 271 F.3d 341, 344 (1st Cir. 2001).

25 Application of force by police officers during the course of an
 26 arrest exceeding that which is reasonably necessary under the extant

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 12

2 circumstances is actionable under § 1983. However, the determination
3 of what is "reasonable" is a fact specific inquiry which will be
4 determined by balancing the individual interests protected by the
5 Fourth Amendment versus the public interest at stake. Hence, the
6 fact-finder will need to pay "careful attention to the facts and
7 circumstances of each particular case, including the severity of the
8 crime at issue, whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the
9 safety of the officers or others, and whether he is actively
10 resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest by flight." Jarret,
11 331 F.3d at 148 (citing Graham, 490 U.S. at 394); Bastien, 279 F.3d
12 at 14. An unprovoked assault is actionable under § 1983 inasmuch as
13 an attack with "no justification, and no motive but punishment...
14 would constitute the use of 'excessive force.'" Gaudreault, 923 F.2d
15 at 207.

17 Thus, even assuming that the initial intervention with decedent
18 may have been justified the question remains as to whether the degree
19 of force actually used both at the time HERRERA was initially
20 restrained and during the period he was held in custody was greater
21 than was reasonably necessary. Once an individual is apprehended
22 there is no longer a need for use of force if the suspect is
23 handcuffed and unable to escape. Beating and kicking arrestees while
24 in the control of the police is clearly excessive force.

24 The severity of injuries resulting from police intervention may
25 be considered in ascertaining the reasonableness of the degree of
26

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 13

2 force used. Bastien, 79 F.3d at 14. In situations where the
3 arrestee was not forcibly resisting the officers, serious and
4 substantial injuries may support an inference of excessive use of
5 force. Santos v. Gates, 287 F.3d 846 (9th Cir. 2002).

6 Further, only when "no genuine dispute exists as to the
7 'objective reasonableness' of the force employed by the police" may
8 summary judgment be granted in defendant's favor. Gaudreault, 923
9 F.2d at 205.

10 **1) Excessive Use of Force and Qualified Immunity**

11 The reasonableness of force used during an arrest "must be
12 judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene,
13 rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight. Because objective
14 reasonableness is the touchstone of the excessive force inquiry, the
15 constitutional and qualified immunity inquiries in this area are
16 closely intertwined." Jarrett, 331 F.3d at 148 (citation and
17 internal quotation marks omitted). The qualified immunity inquiry in
18 Fourth Amendment unreasonable cases is the same as the inquiry into
19 the underlying claims.

20 In theory, substantive liability and qualified
21 immunity are two separate questions and, indeed, may be
22 subject to somewhat different procedural treatment. In
23 police misconduct cases, however, the Supreme Court has
24 used the same 'objectively reasonable' standard in
25 describing both the constitutional test of liability and
26

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 14

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

the Court's own standard for qualified immunity. [It seems unlikely that this case would deserve a different outcome even if the qualified immunity defense had not been raised.

Roy v. Inhabitants of City of Lewiston, 42 F.3d 691, 695 (1st Cir. 1994) (internal citations omitted).

2) Supervisory Liability

The doctrine of *respondeat superior*, whereby liability is imposed on employers for the acts or omissions of their employees is inapposite in actions brought under § 1983. Supervisors will be held accountable under this provision solely "on the basis of [their] own acts or omissions". Barreto-Rivera, 168 F.3d at 48; Diaz v. Martinez, 112 F.3d 1, 4 (1st Cir. 1997); Maldonado-Denis v. Castillo-Rodriguez, 23 F.3d 576, 581 (1st Cir. 1994); Gutierrez-Rodriguez v. Cartagena, 882 F.2d 553, 562 (1st Cir. 1989). Rather, "[s]uch liability can arise out of participation in a custom that leads to a violation of constitutional rights, or by acting with deliberate indifference to the constitutional rights of others." Diaz v. Martinez, 112 F.3d at 4 (citations omitted).

Further, for plaintiff to prevail he must bring evidence of a causal connection or relationship between the alleged misconduct and the supervisor's acts or omissions. "A supervisory officer may be held liable for the behavior of his subordinate officers where his action or inaction [is] affirmative[ly] link[ed]... to that behavior in the sense that it could be characterized as supervisory

1 **CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)****Page 15**

2 encouragement, condonation or acquiescence or gross negligence
3 amounting to deliberate indifference." Wilson, 294 F.3d at 6
4 (citations and internal quotations omitted); Figueroa-Torres v.
5 Toledo-Davila, 232 F.3d 270, 279 (1st Cir. 2000); Barreto-Rivera, 168
6 F.3d at 48;
7
8 Maldonado-Denis, 23 F.3d at 582; Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 882 F.2d at 562

9 **3) Failure to Intervene**

10 Supervisors present when constitutional violations take place
11 "are liable if they participate in the wrong or watch what is
12 occurring and fail to intercede." 1 Vincent R. Fontana, Municipal
13 Liability Law and Practice § 8.7 pp. 281-2 (footnotes omitted) (John
14 Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2nd Ed. 1996). "A superior officer will be held
15 liable if he is actually present on the scene and either participates
16 in the violation or fails to prevent the violation if he has a chance
17 to do so." 1 Isidore Silver, Police Civil Liability § 8.07[1] p. 8-
18 112 (LexisNexis Matthew Bender 2002).

19 The clearest cases of supervisory liability are where
20 the supervisors are present at the scene of police activity
21 and fail to prevent unconstitutional acts by their
22 subordinates. Any police officer may be held liable for
23 the failure to prevent another officer from violating
24 plaintiff's rights if he is present and could have
25 prevented the violation. In the case of supervisory
26 officers, the duty to intervene and to exercise appropriate

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 16

2

3

command functions is greater. The failure to do so is an appropriate basis for liability.

4

5

Michael Avery, David Rudovsky and Karen M. Blum, Police Misconduct Law and Litigation § 4.8 p. 4-14 (footnote omitted) (Thompson-West 3rd ed. 1996)

6

7

The duty to prevent or assist unwarranted use of force by a law enforcement individual applies not only to his superiors but also to fellow officers. "An officer may be liable not only for his personal use of excessive force, but also for his failure to intervene in appropriate circumstances to protect an arrestee from the excessive use of force by his fellow officers." Wilson v. Town of Mendon, 294 F.3d 1, 6 (1st Cir. 2002); Gaudreault, 923 F.2d at 207 n.3 ("An officer who is present at the scene and who fails to take reasonable steps to protect the victim of another officer's use of excessive force can be held liable under section 1983 for his nonfeasance.")

17

18

B. Deliberate Indifference to Serious Medical Needs

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

Plaintiffs concede that Eighth Amendment protection extends only to convicted individuals and have therefore withdrawn references to this particular constitutional provision. However, denial of adequate medical attention to persons either detained and/or arrested also merits constitutional protection.

23

24

25

26

The refusal to provide or the excessive delay in providing a post-arrest detainee with needed medical attention may give rise to a constitutional violation actionable under § 1983 on due process

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 17

2 grounds. Government authorities are required to provide medical care
3 to those injured by police while being apprehended. Further, even
4 though this duty arises under due process principles the courts have
5 adopted the standards developed under the Eighth Amendment applicable
6 to convicted prisoners.

7 "The rights implicated here [lack of medical care] are the due
8 process protections afforded a pre-trial detainee under the
9 Fourteenth Amendment" Gaudreault, 923 F.2d at 208; Ferris v. County
10 of Kennebec, 44 F.Supp.2d 62, 67 n.2; Jesionowski v. Beck, 937
11 F.Supp. 95, 101 (D. Mass. 1996). "The boundaries of this duty have
12 not been plotted exactly; however, it is clear that they extend at
13 least as far as the protection that the Eighth Amendment gives to a
14 convicted prisoner." Gaudreault, 923 F.2d at 208.

15 The applicable standard for determining whether the conduct at
16 issue rises to a constitutional deprivation level is whether the
17 defendants "acted with deliberate indifference ... to [decedent's]
18 serious medical needs." Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 106, 97
19 S.Ct. 285, 50 L.Ed.2d 251 (1976); Gaudreault, 923 F.2d at 208;
20 Ferris, 44 F.Supp.2d at 66-7; Jesionowski 937 F.Supp. at 101

21 "A medical need is 'serious' if it is... one that is so obvious
22 that even a lay person would easily recognize the necessity for a
23 doctor's attention." Gaudreault, 923 F.2d at 208; Ferris, 44
24 F.Supp.2d at 67; Jesionowski, 937 F.Supp. at 101. Further, "[a]bsent
25 evidence of subjective awareness, there could not no 'deliberate
26

1 **CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)****Page 18**

2 indifference' to [plaintiff's] serious medical need." Mahan v.
 3 Plymouth County House of Corrections, 64 F.3d 14, 18 (1st Cir. 1995).

4 "The 'seriousness' of an [arrestee's] needs may also be
 5 determined by reference to the effect of the delay of treatment."
 6 Gaudreault, 923 F.2d at 208.

7 In the process of evaluating a summary judgment petition the
 8 court will evaluate whether the arrestee "display[ed] any 'serious
 9 medical needs' during the hours following his arrest." *Id.*
 10

11 **1) Qualified Immunity and Indifference to Medical Needs**

12 Qualified immunity shields officials from having to pay for
 13 damages resulting from violations of § 1983 provided "their conduct
 14 does not violate clearly established statutory authority or
 15 constitutional rights of which a reasonable person would have known."

16 Dimarco-Zappa v. Cabanillas, 238 F.3d 25, 35 (1st Cir. 2001)
 17 (citations and internal quotations omitted); Diaz v. Martinez, 112
 18 F.3d at 3. "For purposes of this defense, a right is clearly
 19 established if the 'contours of the right [are] sufficiently clear
 20 that a reasonable official would understand that what he is doing
 21 violates that right.'" *Id.* (citing Anderson v. Creighton, 483 U.S.
 22 635, 640, 107 S.Ct. 3034, 1039, 97 L.Ed.2d 523 (1987)).

23 Because qualified immunity is an affirmative defense it is
 24 defendant's burden to present evidence of its applicability. Dimarco-
Zappa, 238 F.3d at 35.

25

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 19

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

Defendants do not contend that deliberate indifference to an arrestee's medical needs was not a clearly established constitutional protection in **August 1997**. Rather, their qualified immunity arguments rest on the purported lack of evidence of conduct which would rise to the level of a § 1983 violation.

VII. § 1985 & EQUAL PROTECTION

Section 1985(3) proscribes conspiracies to deprive persons of their constitutional rights. "To state a claim under § 1985(3) a plaintiff must allege the existence of (1) a conspiracy, (2) a conspiratorial purpose to deprive a person or class of persons, directly or indirectly, of the equal protection of the laws or equal privileges and immunities under the laws, (3) an overt act in furtherance of the conspiracy, and (4) either (a) an injury to person or property, or (b) a deprivation of a constitutionally protected right or privilege." Aulson v. Blanchard, 83 F.3d 1, 3 (1st Cir. 1996).

Equal protection within the aforementioned provision specifically denotes conduct motivated by "some racial, or ... otherwise class-based, invidiously discriminatory animus". Griffin v. Breckenridge, 403 U.S. 88, 102, 91 S.Ct. 1790, 1798, 29 L.Ed.2d 338 (1971); Aulson, 83 F.3d at 3 ("conspiratorial conduct... [must be] propelled by ...'invidiously discriminatory animus'") (citing Griffin); Donahue v. City of Boston, 304 F.3d 110, 122 (1st Cir. 2002) (in order to prevail plaintiffs must present evidence that "(1) some

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 20

2 class-based animus (usually racial) lay behind the conspirators'
3 action, and (2) that the conspiracy was aimed at interfering with
4 protected rights."); Burns v. State Police Assoc. of Mass., 230 F.3d
5 8, 12 (1st Cir. 2000).

6 In order to establish racial discriminatory animus in this case
7 in contravention of his equal protection guarantees plaintiffs must
8 present evidence to prove that decedent, as an illegal alien from the
9 Dominican Republic, was intentionally treated by defendants
10 differently from other similarly situated illegal aliens and that no
11 reasonable justification existed for the difference in treatment.
12 Village of Willowbrook v. Olech, 528 U.S. 1073, ___, 120 S.Ct. 1073,
13 1074, 145 L.Ed.2d 1060 (2000); Burns v. State Police Assoc. of Mass.,
14 230 F.3d at 12 n.4.

15 Plaintiffs have proffered sufficient documentary evidence in
16 support of the allegation that the "operativo" specifically targeted
17 Dominican nationals to withstand defendants' summary judgment
18 request. According to the record before us, these individuals were
19 detained based solely on their national alienage and turned over to
20 federal authorities with exclusive deportation authority. Those
21 rounded up as part of the "Zero Tolerance" initiative had not
22 committed any crime nor were they charged with any criminal offense.
23 Their detention was motivated exclusively by their national origin.

24 Further, the purported harsh treatment decedent received during
25 the course of his arrest, and the subsequent failure to provide
26

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 21

2 medical care as alleged also raise an inference of discriminatory
3 animus when examined within the context of the evidence submitted by
4 plaintiffs in this action.
5

6 Thus, we conclude that there is sufficient evidence before us to
7 conclude that the named defendants acted in common and mutual concert
8 to deprive decedent of the equal protection of the law based on
9 national origin.
10

VIII. NINTH AMENDMENT

11 Plaintiffs do not object to the dismissal of references to the
12 Ninth Amendment in the complaint as superfluous inasmuch as
13 violations under the Fourth Amendment and Due Process provisions have
14 been adequately pled. Plaintiffs' Omnibus Opposition... (docket No.
15 199) p. 40. Accordingly references in the complaint to the Ninth
16 Amendment are hereby **STRICKEN**.
17

IX. SUPPLEMENTAL JURISDICTION

18 Plaintiffs having asserted valid claims as to which there is
19 original federal jurisdiction defendants' request that these be
20 dismissed is **DENIED**. The court will entertain all related local
21 causes of action asserted by plaintiffs as provided for in 28 U.S.C.
22 § 1367.
23

X. THE MOTIONS

A. Codefendants EDUARDO MARTINEZ-COLON & ORLANDO ORTIZ

24 EDUARDO MARTINEZ-COLON denies having supervisory functions
25 during the "operativo" carried out on August 16, 1997 and also
26

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 22

2 _____

3 disclaims any personal involvement in the events charged in the

4 complaint. According to the facts proffered by Officer MARTINEZ-

5 COLON his role that evening was to pose as a decoy in the

6 establishments targeted for intervention and safeguard the back

7 entrance. MARTINEZ-COLON further avers that his only contact with

8 HERRERA the evening of **August 16, 1997** was when decedent was brought

9 back after being arrested and did not ride in the van where the

10 detainees were transported. Specifically, he argues that "he is not

11 liable under section 1983 since he personally did not participate in

12 any of the alleged acts for which plaintiffs are suing." Brief...

13 (docket No. 174) p. 11.

14 However, according to the evidence submitted by plaintiffs

15 codefendant was present and failed to intervene when decedent was

16 brought back in obvious distress after his arrest as well as when

17 ORTIZ placed HERRERA in a Trooper for an undisclosed purpose and for

18 an undetermined period of time.

19 Regarding his denial of supervisory status that evening,

20 codefendant ORTIZ identified MARTINEZ-COLON as his immediate

21 supervisor on the night of the events.

22 Police officer ORLANDO ORTIZ denies the allegations of excessive

23 use of force and claims that decedent's detention and arrest were in

24 conformity with the Fourth Amendment's "reasonableness" standard.

25 The officer relates decedent's suspicious behavior which prompted

26 DIAZ PORTALATIN to give orders for his apprehension, the ensuing

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 23

2

3 chase, eventual arrest and walking back to the van all carried out in
4 conformity with the applicable standards.

5

6 However, plaintiffs have submitted statements of area residents
7 which directly contradict the manner in which ORTIZ handled the
8 arrest and what transpired from the time HERRERA was initially taken
9 into custody until he was placed in the van. These neighbors claim
10 to have witnessed decedent (1) being dragged from beneath the vehicle
11 where he was hiding, (2) beaten on at least two separate occasions,
12 and (3) placed in a Trooper for an unaccounted purpose and for an
13 indefinite period of time prior to delivering him to the van.

14 Codefendants MARTINEZ-COLON and ORTIZ raise the defense of
15 qualified immunity arguing that plaintiffs' claims against them "do
16 not constitute a violation of a federal civil right." Brief...

17 (docket No. 174) p. 23. Specifically, they contend that
18 "[p]laintiffs have not identified nor provided solid evidence of a
19 single act of defendant Martinez-Colón that demonstrates that he
20 failed to provide adequate medical care [or that] defendant Ortiz...
21 used excessive force during the detention of Rafael Herrera".
22 Petitioners argue that there could have been no beating and ergo no
23 lack of needed medical attention since HERRERA died of natural causes
24 as a result of a sickle cell anemia crisis.

25 Plaintiffs have met their burden of presenting sufficient
26 evidence to raise an issue of fact regarding the "reasonableness" of
the conduct of both MARTINEZ-COLON and ORTIZ. There is testimony

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 24

2 from witnesses to the events when they saw decedent being hit, pushed
3 and shoved, heard him screaming begging not to be beaten and
4 notifying the arresting officers that he simply had no documents.
5

6 As previously indicated, in excessive use of force actions the
7 evidence for the underlying § 1983 claim is the same as that relied
8 upon for ruling on the applicability of qualified immunity. Because
9 determination of liability based on the use of excessive force and
10 availability of qualified immunity in this particular case are
11 premised on the same facts, it is a factual inquiry that needs to be
12 presented to the jury.

13 Factual disputes also preclude granting qualified immunity
14 regarding the claim for failure to provide medical care. Plaintiffs
15 have adequately challenged petitioners' argument that HERRERA's
16 demise did not come as a result of a beating and hence no claim for
17 disregarding his medical needs is viable. The opinion proffered by
18 DR. MEHLMAN, plaintiffs' medical expert directly contradicts that of
19 the local forensic expert used by defendants in support of this
20 theory. DR. MEHLMAN not only rejected the hypothesis that death
21 resulted from a sickle cell anemia crisis but further opined that
22 HERRERA died of a "closed-head trauma" which caused probable seizure
23 and coma.

24 B. Codefendant ROBERT GARCIA

25 GARCIA, a Treasury agent, denies having used any force against
26 decedent or violating in any way decedent's constitutional rights.

1 **CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)**

Page 25

2

Codefendant claims his role was limited to providing support to
3
ORTIZ, the police officer who detained HERRERA.

4

This version runs contrary to neighborhood residents who
5
declared having seen GARCIA beating HERRERA along with police officer
6
ORTIZ on at least two separate occasions. Further, plaintiffs have
7
submitted evidence pointing to GARCIA, joined by ORTIZ, placing
8
decedent in an Isuzu Trooper prior to taking him to the white Ford
9
van purportedly for an additional beating.

10

Given the disputed material facts regarding GARCIA's role the
11
evening of **August 16, 1997** summary judgment in his favor is not
12
proper at this juncture.

13

C. Codefendants MIGUEL GUADALUPE & JOSE DIAZ PORTALATIN

14

Codefendant MIGUEL GUADALUPE was assigned to drive the white
15
Ford van during the "operativo" on **August 16, 1997**. He denies any
16
wrongdoing and asserts his only intervention regarding decedent was
17
to "frisk" him prior to boarding the van and asking HERRERA "if he
18
was all right, which was answered in the affirmative." Memorandum
19
of Law... (docket No. 197) p. 9. Codefendant further claims that at
20
no time did decedent complain of having been hit nor did he appear to
21
have been beaten.

22

However, witnesses on scene describe how GUADALUPE violently
23
threw decedent into the van, causing him to bang his head against the
24
window frame severely injuring him and how HERRERA landed halfway
25
on the floor and seat. Further, during the entire time codefendant
26

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 26

2 _____
3 was driving the van he ignored obvious signs which denoted a
4 condition which warranted prompt medical attention including specific
5 comments from the passengers.

6 Again, the crucial facts regarding the acts and/or omissions of
7 codefendant during the "operativo" the night in question remain
8 unsettled based on the evidence adduced by plaintiffs and must
9 therefore be elucidated at trial.

10 Codefendant JOSE DIAZ PORTALATIN concedes that on **August 16,**
11 **1997** he was in charge of the Special Arrests Unit of the PRPD and
12 responsible for implementing and carrying out an "operativo" as part
13 of the "Zero Tolerance Plan". That the "operativo" was to be carried
14 out by agents from the Special Arrests Unit, the Criminal
15 Investigations Corps of San Juan, the Canine Unit and the Treasury
16 Department. Officer DIAZ PORTALATIN further acknowledges that upon
17 noticing decedent hastily leave the "El Nuevo Horizonte" bar he gave
18 instructions to chase him and that ORTIZ and GARCIA took off after
19 HERRERA and eventually brought him back under arrest. That after
20 conclusion of the "operativo" that night the detainees were taken to
21 the airport to be turned over to INS but because there was no one
22 available to take them into custody they had to be taken instead to
23 the Puerto Nuevo police station. That it was not until they reached
24 the police station that he was first alerted to the fact that there
25 was something wrong with HERRERA for which reason he ordered that
26 decedent be taken to the nearest hospital.

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 27

2

3 Petitioner denies personal participation in any deprivation of
4 decedent's rights and rejects claims of having disregarded decedent's
5 serious medical needs.

6

7 Plaintiffs on the other hand have presented evidence which, if
8 credible, places DIAZ PORTALATIN at the scene and being personally
9 involved in the events leading to HERRERA's death either by failing
10 to take action to stop violations committed in his presence and/or
11 through deliberate indifference to decedent's obvious need of medical
12 attention.

13

14 Even though DIAZ PORTALATIN rejects plaintiffs' description of
15 decedent's physical condition after he was taken into custody,
16 codefendant acknowledged that he was present when decedent was
17 brought back after his arrest and inquired if decedent was feeling
18 well because "they were breathing heavily from the run [and that]
19 Rafael Herrera said that he was tired. Immediately after, Rafael
20 Herrera was helped into the van." Brief... (docket No. 174) p. 17.
21 (footnotes omitted).

22

23 Codefendant also had contact with the detainees in the van at
24 different points in time throughout the evening until they eventually
25 arrived at the Puerto Nuevo police station and at no time took action
26 to address decedent's obvious need for medical attention. Again,
issues of material fact preclude summary judgment as requested.

27

28 DIAZ-PORTALATIN states that he was not the supervisor of either
29 GUADALUPE nor GARCIA on **August 16-7, 1997** and thus, not liable for

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 28

3 their acts or omissions. Further, that even though he was the
4 supervisor of codefendants MARTINEZ-COLON and ORTIZ on that evening
5 there is no supervisory liability for their conduct because he was
6 not put on notice of behavior likely to result in a civil rights
deprivation.

8 The fact that codefendant's underlings had no prior records of
9 wrongdoing is irrelevant to the aforementioned claims as articulated
by plaintiffs.

11 GUADALUPE and DIAZ-PORTALATIN argue they are entitled to
12 qualified immunity defense based on the alleged absence of factual
13 underpinnings for a constitutional violation on their part.
14 Specifically, they contend:

24 Defendants are also entitled to qualified immunity
25 because they acted according to the law, in good faith and
26 within the scope of their duties as officers of the Police

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 29

2

3

Department. In fact, their conduct at all times was well
within the scope of their duties.

4

Memorandum of Law... (docket No. 197) pp. 19-20.

5

6

In sum, they disclaim any personal involvement in the alleged
constitutional breach. However, plaintiffs' version of codefendants'
acts and/or omissions vis à vis decedent as previously described
raise a factual controversy of the kind and degree that preclude
summary judgment.

7

8

9

10

XI. INTERLOCUTORY APPEAL

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

Plaintiffs argue that defendants have raised the qualified immunity defense as a subterfuge for further delaying the proceedings by means of an immediate appeal. The interlocutory denial of a qualified immunity defense request may be immediately appealable if the court's decision "is based on a purely legal ground, such as a finding that the conduct described by the plaintiff, assuming it occurred, transgressed a clearly established right." Diaz v. Martinez, 112 F.3d at 3. However, denials of a qualified immunity defense based on issues of fact necessitate the entry of a final judgment as a pre-requisite for appellate review. *Id.*

In this particular case plaintiffs have documented a series of events which, if found believable at trial, would constitute deprivation of rights safeguarded by § 1983 by each one of the named defendants and which also preclude qualified immunity. Thus, appeal

27

1 CIVIL NO. 98-1926 (RLA)

Page 30

2

3 at this time would be inappropriate under clear First Circuit
4 precedent.

5 **XII. CONCLUSION**

6

7 Based on the foregoing, defendants' motions for summary judgment²
8 are hereby **DENIED**.

9

10 IT IS SO ORDERED.

11

12 San Juan, Puerto Rico, this 17 day of July, 2003.

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23 ² See Brief in Support of Motion for Summary Judgment of
24 Defendants EDUARDO MARTINEZ-COLON and ORLANDO ORTIZ-FERNANDEZ (docket
25 No. 174); Brief in Support of Motion for Partial Summary Judgment of
26 Defendant ROBERT GARCIA-PEREZ (docket No. 196); Memorandum of Law in
Support of Motion for Summary Judgment, filed by defendants MIGUEL
GUADALUPE-PARRILLA and JOSE DIAZ-PORTALATIN (docket No. 197);
Plaintiffs' Opposition to Motions for Summary Judgment (docket No.
199) and Defendant ROBERT GARCIA-PEREZ's Reply... (docket No. 202).